a Volunteer Army that would become the nucleus of the military forces of the restored Russian Empire. They started from the haven of monarchist elements of the Don region, but their call for volunteers brought only a feeble response; out of more than three hundred thousand former officers, fewer than three thousand enrolled. The "army" counted a dozen regiments, battalions, squadrons, and special units, but these were merely skeleton organizations; actually, it had no more firepower than one regular battalion. The minimum age for enrollment was sixteen years, but many younger teen-agers were lured into the adventure. Volunteers were required to sign up for four months of service, but some left before this term was up. At times, the "army's" actual strength sank to a thousand men.

Despite this modest beginning, the Volunteer Army played an important—and tragic—role in the civil war in south Russia. Wherever it went, it forced the people to choose between Tsarist and Red despotism, and the final result of its operations was to restore to the Bolsheviks the moral prestige they had lost after the dispersion of the Constituent Assembly and the Brest-Litovsk treaty. The strength of the Volunteer Army lay in its superb military organization, the fighting spirit of its original cadres, and the people's hatred of the Communists. Its weakness was the political blindness of its leaders, their stubborn attempt to wipe out the revolution and bring back the old regime.

At the beginning of 1918, Russia also had other anti-Communist armed forces: the Polish legion in the north, the Czech legion in the south, the Ukrainian divisions and the Cossack regiments on the Don and the Kuban, in the Urals and in Siberia. Together they might have crushed the armies of the People's Commissars, but they never joined forces.

In January, 1919, the Communists launched an offensive against the Don. Many Cossacks declared themselves neutral, a few joined the Communists, a handful enrolled in the Volunteer Army. Village after village and town after town fell into the hands of the Reds. The Communists used ruthless terror to suppress resistance. Thousands of prisoners, including the wounded in hospitals, were tortured and killed. The Volunteers retaliated by public mass executions. In February, Communists occupied the Don region. The Volunteer Army—then four thousand men under the command of Kornilov and the political leadership of Alexeev—began to retreat south, toward the North Caucasus. Kornilov's long career was ended by a shell, and General Denikin, his successor, led what was left of his troops into the steppes at the foot of the Caucasian ridge. Meanwhile Cossack villages that had declared themselves neutral took up arms against the Reds. The anti-Communist movement spread from the North Caucasus north-